

Burien Town Hall Forum
May 22, 2007

To put the Burien Town Hall Forum into perspective, the library at Highline High School had students ranging from grade levels 8 through 12, all waiting to hear their hosts Heather O'Brien and Anna Pak speak. This forum began with an introduction of the Burien Teen Leadership Council, followed by the introduction of the opening keynote speaker, Adam Fletcher, founder and coordinator of The Freechild Project. Adam came to share about the importance of youth voice as well as how each of them can make a difference in their community.

There was a lot of energy and excitement in the room as students broke out into small groups. They now had the opportunity to voice their opinions on issues regarding: school spirit, the relationship between administration and police officers, violence both at school and in the community, other "hot" issues as well as input for the new community center. Each group had a representative from the community acting as facilitator along with a member from the Burien Teen Leadership Council.

In these groups students actively communicated their views that their schools and community are improving on spirit, they defined what the word "relationship" meant to them as issues that revolve around relationships, they don't always feel comfortable talking to authority, violence is just down the block from where they live, and there are not enough activities for teens to do in the evening and on the weekends.

Not only did the students voice their views, but they also helped brainstorm solutions to the many issues. Some of these solutions included having more clubs and recreational activities available after school. Students suggested having a variety of spirit days instead of continuing with the ones that have always been done. They also suggested educating the parents about the violence in the community and keeping them more aware.

Afterwards, a representative from each group was able to share what they felt was the most important topic they discussed in their group. The students were enthusiastic about having the chance to share their own judgments on issues and solutions to those issues discussed earlier in the forum.

To close the forum, a group from Unexpected Productions (Seattle's Theater Sports) performed improvisational skits. The actors involved the teens by either having them pick topics or actually having them come up and act with them. The room was filled with laughter and energy. It was a great way to end the morning.

As a hostess I enjoyed watching the hard-work of the facilitators as they participated in giving guidance, and of the BTLC contributing encouragement. While there is a great need in making sure youths have a voice in our community, the youth in the forum were concerned about whether or not there will be any change. As a leader, I feel it's important and necessary we give direction for a better change.